

Several years ago, there was little awareness at the federal level about the possible devastation that could be caused by a major earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone. Making that point required law enforcement and elected officials from our congressional district and others to turn back the pages of history to 1811 and the last series of quakes to shake our region.

Those disasters caused the Mississippi River to run in reverse for three days and the shock waves rang church bells as far away as Boston. In those days, there was damage, but the effects of a 7.0 magnitude earthquake today would be gravely different.

Much of the major transportation infrastructure in our region runs through the New Madrid Seismic Zone: highways, bridges, railways and rivers which carry billion of dollars in commerce from east to west, north to south in our state and nation. Our national energy infrastructure is similarly situated, with pipelines carrying oil and natural gas through our region to destinations all over the country. A major earthquake would cripple our national economy and sever the supply of domestic energy resources from their respective markets.

In the end, we were able to convince federal authorities that the potential for this kind of a disaster merited more attention. Especially after Hurricane Katrina, we are obligated to do everything in our power to understand the possible challenges of a humanitarian disaster and, even more importantly, to put the right plan in place to respond should the worst case come to pass.

The Great Central U.S. Shakeout is set for April 28th. It is an earthquake drill of the largest proportion, involving federal, state and local authorities in a tabletop disaster-and-response situation. Our key communications channels will be tested, and so will our ability to get help wherever it may be most needed as quickly as possible – even if roads are impassable, buildings unstable, and the ability to help far exceeded by the need for help.

Some parts of the Eighth Congressional District will surely be affected directly should a major earthquake occur in the New Madrid Seismic Zone today. Other counties would be called upon to help by providing relief supplies, taking in people displaced by a natural disaster, and lending law enforcement and emergency personnel to a massive response effort. For families, this is a time to review emergency procedures in the home and to make sure a kit is on hand with essential supplies: water, canned food, a battery-powered radio, a flashlight, and whatever else

might be necessary to shelter-in-place.

To date, more than 360,000 individuals have signed up online to take part in the Shakeout on April 28th. If you would like to be a part of the day's exercise and have not yet registered, go online to visit www.shakeout.gov and learn more about how to protect yourself and your family during an earthquake.

The website, sponsored by the Central U.S. Earthquake Consortium in conjunction with FEMA, the American Red Cross, the U.S. Geological Survey and others, offers a wide range of materials for families, businesses, non-profit organizations, local governments and educational institutions. I've reviewed it, and so should you. After all – this drill is something we've asked for, and something we may someday be very glad we did.